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ABSTRACT

Outcomes of the local school-based management (LSBM) plan, implemented by the District of Columbia public schools in 1989, are presented in this report. The 17 participating sites included 2 senior, 3 junior, 1 extended elementary, 9 elementary, and 2 special education schools. Data gathered from structured interviews with 12 of the participating principals are the focus of this report. Findings indicate that LSBM's initial implementation was characterized by frequent changes in coordination and disagreement between the officers' and teachers' unions, becoming more productive and better coordinated in the last third of the school year. Principals considered meetings with central office administrators to be beneficial, providing opportunities for receiving information, networking, and giving feedback. They viewed the concept of the Direct Activity Purchase System (DAPS) positively, but were concerned about its restrictions. An outcome was an increase in staff development and awareness activities. Principals' concerns centered on the school/central administrative relationship, particularly with the operational divisions. Recommendations for improving LSBM include: (1) provision of a written policy statement of roles and responsibilities; (2) appointment of a central office administrator to facilitate and direct program implementation; and (3) coordination of professional development and training activities with ongoing school development/involvement initiatives. The interview guide is included in the appendix. (LMI)

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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

LOCAL SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS: FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PILOT SITES

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Andrew E. Jenkins III
Superintendent of Schools
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September 1990

EA 022 417

District of Columbia Public Schools

LOCAL SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS: FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PILOT SITES

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LOCAL SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS: FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PILOT SITES

The Local school-based management (LSBM) process was initiated by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) during March 1989. LSBM was identified as a process by which DCPS would improve student achievement based on the following beliefs:

1. Schools are the units that have direct impact on student achievement. Schools, therefore, have to have the capacity to identify and respond to student needs.

2. Accountability for student achievement is a shared responsibility. All of the stakeholders-- students, teachers, parents, administrators and support staff-- bear this responsibility.

3. All stakeholders must be involved in the decisions that impact on their efforts to improve student achievement, since their greater involvement will result in improved school program practices and climate.

4. Central administration has to play a facilitating role to enable schools to respond to their needs.

All principals were asked to indicate an interest in the selection of their school as a pilot site for LSBM. Letters of interest, supported by two thirds of a school faculty, were submitted by principals during April 1989 from potential pilot sites.

During May 1989, principals or their representatives, from eighteen schools were oriented to the concept of LSBM and the identification of local school needs. The orientation session consisted of a statement of the mission and goals of LSBM and components of the pilot process. Principals were directed to discuss with their faculty and to secure again the support of two thirds of their faculty before approval could be granted to serve as a pilot LSBM site.

Sixteen school principals provided letters of commitment supported by two thirds of their faculty to the Superintendent of Schools during June 1989. Letters indicated (a) commitment to the mission statement, (b) understanding and support for the goals and outcomes as identified and to be further refined, (c) commitment to a planning council as the vehicle for LSBM implementation, and (d) willingness to undertake a self-assessment of their school climate.

The following schools were announced by the Superintendent of Schools as LSBM pilot sites for School Year (SY) 1989-90:

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Senior High Schools:	McKinley and Spingarn
Junior High Schools:	Browne, Jefferson and Roper
Extended Elementary:	Fletcher-Johnson Education Center
Elementary Schools:	Adams*, Barnard, Bryan, Draper, Janney, J.O. Wilson, McGogney, Raymond and River Terrace/Smothers
Special Education:	Mamie D. Lee and Sharpe Health

* - Adams was selected after the June 1989 time period.

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Initial activities related to LSBM included several steps to orient pilot participants to principles of school-based management and shared decision-making. Research information and summaries were presented to stimulate discussion and the development of perspective on LSBM. Central office facilitators made presentations at local schools upon request. A planning/ implementation team consisting primarily of principals and union representatives received training provided by the Danforth Foundation School Administrators Program in Clearwater, Florida. Training received by the implementation/ planning team was to be shared with their respective groups.

Planning groups from each of the 17 schools were to formulate issues related to LSBM for dissemination with the central administrative LSBM coordinator. Those issues were then developed into a document, which was shared with Assistant Superintendents and members of the Superintendents cabinet.

Goals to be accomplished by the end of SY 1989-90 were the development of school plans that contained the following information: visions, mission statements, goals, indicators of success, activities necessary for reaching goals, resources, time lines, and responsible persons.

The purpose of this report is to present impressions of LSBM pilot site principals on their experiences as participants in the "Year of Preparation" for implementing local school-based management.

ASSESSMENT OF THE YEAR OF PREPARATION

This section presents a summary of the impressions of LSBM pilot site principals during the "Year of Preparation" for the implementation of the shared decision-making model. Staff from the Research and Evaluation Branch scheduled interviews with 15 of the 17 pilot site principals during the months of June and July 1990. A structured interview protocol was used to focus each of the interviews (See Appendix). Twelve of the 15 scheduled interviews were completed by August 17, 1990, representing each school level/type, and were summarized for inclusion in this report. Most of the interviews were recorded on audio tape while others were recorded on paper. The following perceptions were generated via the interviews.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE PROCESS USED TO IMPLEMENT LSBM

All of the principals interviewed agreed that LSBM got off to a slow start. There was confusion about the concept of LSBM, disagreement about representation on the advisory council by unions, and frequent changes in school system coordination of LSBM by central administration. Leadership by the fifth coordinator during SY 1989-90, David L. Huie, was cited as the positive turning point during the Year of Preparation. One principal reported that "... it [LSBM] has become more organized, under good control... so it's gotten better... We've been introduced to the research and met key players in DCPS, had an opportunity to share..." An elementary level principal responded "It's just beginning to show some direction. I haven't thought about the strengths and weaknesses because, at this point, we haven't really started." Another principal stated, "... the frequent turnover in leadership during the year was a weakness as was the lack of agreement between the officers and teachers union's about membership on the school advisory council." One elementary level principal indicated, "We were not able to accomplish all that we wanted to do. We did not receive the allocated monies we thought we were going to receive. Central offices were not communicating with one another or the [operating] divisions, which caused false starts, missed opportunities, and wrong types of information to be given." There were no significant differences noted by school level in responses to this question.

AMOUNT OF TIME ALLOCATED TO IMPLEMENTING LSBM

Respondents indicated holding an average of one meeting per month with their school-based planning committee. Those sessions consisted of a combination of planning and staff development

activities. One of the principals of a special education school indicated that time had been allocated primarily during staff development days, meetings with parents, and faculty meetings. An elementary principal indicated spending about two hours per week on developing the management plan. Differences noted by school level indicated that secondary level principals believed they spent more time preparing for LSBM than did elementary principals.

INVOLVEMENT OF STAFF, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS IN THE LSBM IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

One elementary level principal reported that faculty, staff and parents had been involved in staff development related to LSBM on an on-going basis since the Spring of 1989. Most of the other principals indicated that LSBM was discussed at most of the faculty and PTA meetings held during SY 1989-90. Most of the elementary schools had not involved students in the planning process though two elementary school principals involved student council presidents in some discussions. One Special Education school also indicated that student involvement was minimal.

Regular awareness sessions were provided for school-based planning teams composed of parents, teachers, and support staff (including students at the secondary level). The number of people involved in planning for LSBM ranged from 15-25 across pilot schools. Participants on the planning teams were selected in three different ways. Participants were either designated because of positions held in the school or parent organization, self-selected, or elected by their representative peer group. Designated positions were more likely to exist on the secondary level planning teams.

LSBM RELATED STAFF DEVELOPMENT

As was noted above, many principals used staff development activities as a means of providing LSBM awareness to their faculty and parent groups. Thus, all principals reported providing staff development for teachers and parents active in the parental organization across SY '89-90. Teachers and members of the LSBM planning teams received more intensive staff development beyond the awareness level on topics such as shared decision-making, the planning process, and conflict resolution. SAGE (the strategic planning process) and DAPS (Direct Activity Purchase System) in-service activities were often mentioned as staff development activities.

IMPRESSIONS OF DAPS

All of the respondents liked the Direct Activity Purchase System (DAPS), at least in concept. One elementary principal liked the fact that DAPS was needs responsive. Another indicated

that "... the concept is great," while a third said, "DAPS gives us the ability to spend what we need to spend and not have to go through a long, drawn-out procedure." In general, principals liked the ability to access vendors directly and to make purchases. The biggest limitations were the $300 daily expenditure limit and restrictions on how the money could be spent. One secondary level principal indicated that each school should be made aware of the amount of money to be allocated annually to LSBM schools so that better financial planning could be undertaken. A need for additional training relative to the ordering process was indicated by many school sites.

IMPACT OF INTERACTIONS WITH ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES IN DCPS

All respondents without previous direct interaction with central administrative office heads indicated that this component of the Year of Preparation was among the most beneficial and helpful. One principal reported, "... extremely useful! We got information straight from the horse's mouth." Another principal reported that the interactions have already paid off in terms of improved delivery of services to his school. The only response that bordered on the negative pertained to changes in central office contacts. Some of the key players that LSBM principals had the opportunity to interact with were not in place, in the same positions, as the school year progressed. This meant having to start over and re-establish contact with the new key player(s). Only one elementary principal, a former central administrator, indicated that those sessions were of minimal benefit due to previous interactions with key central administrators.

USE OF DATA IN PREPARATION AND PLANNING FOR LSBM IMPLEMENTATION

"Data have been used to set a course of direction for LSBM at my school, " reported one elementary level principal. Another elementary level principal said, "Data have been used to develop the school improvement plan." Six of the 11 respondents included in this report made specific reference to the wealth of data provided by the Office of Educational Accountability and Planning as very helpful. As a result, most principals did not indicate additional specific data needs though there was one request from an elementary level principal for demographic data on students and needs assessment data. Another principal desired information on vendor standards for use in making purchases via DAPS. A third principal desired implementation information on LSBM from other school systems.

IMPEDIMENTS TO IMPLEMENTATION OF LSBM

Though the flow of responses varied from one principal to the next, there was general agreement that the relationship of LSBM schools to the existing administrative structure in the

operational divisions needed to be clarified. Some tension was reported between the operational divisions and the LSBM sites at the secondary level. Among the comments provided by LSBM principals were:

1. Full support to LSBM implementation needs to be provided by the Superintendent and central administration.

2. Clarification of the role of central administration regarding LSBM needs to be made (e.g., is the central administrative role to facilitate or inhibit local school authority).

3. The relationship between central administration and LSBM sites should be put into writing so that roles and responsibilities of each component will be clear and will not result in a power struggle or negative attitudes.

4. Central administration should be less defensive in its communications with principals and other central administrators, especially in areas where improved service delivery has been slow.

OTHER EDUCATIONAL REFORM AGENDA ACTIVITIES THAT PILOT SITES ARE INVOLVED WITH

Pilot LSBM sites are participating in additional educational reform agenda activities and projects. Five of the schools are participating in the SAGE strategic planning process; one is participating in both in the Comer School Development Program and SAGE; and all are participating in such programs as substance abuse awareness/education, public-private partnerships, etc. Additional innovative programs funded by parent groups, public-private partners, and community outreach groups existed in many schools.

SUMMARY

LSBM got off to a slow and controversial start and was impeded by frequent changes in coordination and disagreement between the officers union and the teachers union about the number of participants from each group on the school advisory councils. The last third of SY 1989-90 was considered to be the most productive period for LSBM because of the excellent coordination and focus provided by the fourth LSBM coordinator.

Sessions with key administrators responsible for personnel, facilities management, administrative services, finance, etc. were considered beneficial because of the opportunity to learn

the rationale behind various procedures and the benefits of networking. Those sessions also provided feedback to key central administrators on services being provided and some suggestions for improvement. Most of the principals agreed that the ability to connect a name and face with a function was beneficial.

DAPS was viewed positively, in concept, by all principals responding. However, all LSBM principals expressed concerns about the daily expenditure limit of $300 and purchase restrictions.

LSBM pilot site principals reported that awareness activities had been provided to students, teachers, support staff, and parents at all reporting sites, often provided through the vehicle of staff development. Staff development had been more intensive for members of the planning teams than for other building staff persons, parents, or students in general. Teachers appeared to have more staff development exposure to LSBM than did any other reference group.

Concerns about the future progress of LSBM centered on the relationship of LSBM schools to central administrative offices, particularly the operational divisions. These concerns were most obvious in the secondary level pilot sites. All of the respondents indicated either that the relationship between central administration and LSBM pilots needed to be formalized and/or formalized and written so that the roles and responsibilities and relationship between each will be clearly understood. The latter was seen as a measure to reduce turf battles and potential attitude problems as sources of friction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on feedback generated by principals piloting Local School-Based Management in DCPS during the Year of Preparation, the following recommendations for action are provided:

1. A memorandum of understanding should be developed and signed outlining the roles, requirements, relationships and responsibilities of entities that (a) formulate policies related to LSBM (e.g., superintendent, Board of Education), (b) direct LSBM sites (principals, school-based planning teams, parent groups, etc.), and (c) provide services to LSBM sites (e.g., facilities management, payroll, procurement, personnel services, etc.). Role confusion is common when organizations institute change. Key players need to understand what their roles are and how they are to interact with each other when increased authority and autonomy become vested in local schools.

2. Central administrative responsibility for oversight of LSBM should be placed in an appropriate office and an officer should be appointed from that office to provide and direct school system support for LSBM with authority from the superintendent of schools. For LSBM to prosper in DCPS, a central force with authority from the superintendent needs to be appointed to facilitate and mediate the implementation process. Frequent changes in leadership have contributed to the delay and sense of frustration on the part of principals in getting LSBM moving.

3. Professional development and training activities provided should be coordinated with on-going school development/involvement initiatives currently taking place in DCPS to maximize use of training staff and provide more focus to training activities. Many of the principles of the Comer model, SAGE, school involvement, effective schools correlates, etc. overlap. Training activities should focus on the best of those models with emphasis on components such as team building, shared decision-making, planning processes, etc.

APPENDIX

[Structured Interview for Local School-Based Management]

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR
LOCAL SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

1. What are your impressions of the process that has been used to implement LSBM?

   Strengths:

   Weaknesses:

2. How much time has been allocated to planning for LSBM at your school?

   Who is involved in planning at your school and in what areas?

   Identify positions and the number of people involved in planning.

3. To what extent have staff, parents and students at your building been made aware of LSBM?
   (List awareness activities.)

4. How were they selected to participate in planning LSBM?

5. Has LSBM related staff development been provided at your school? (Circle one.)

   Yes No

   For whom and what type:

   _____ Teachers Type: _____

   _____ Support Staff Type: _____

   _____ Students Type: _____

   _____ Parents Type: _____

6. What are your experiences with and impressions of DAPS?

   What is working with DAPS?

   What is not working with DAPS?

7. Haw useful were the interactions that you had (during LSBM sessions) with Finance, Facilities Management, Teacher Services, etc.?

   Have there been any positive impacts?

   Have there been any negative impacts?

8. What use have you made of available data in your school for planning the implementation of LSBM?

9. What data do you need to have available to assist you in planning/implementing LSBM?

   When do you need the data and in what form/format?

10. What characteristics make a LSBM school different from other schools in DCPS?

    What is the most important factor that could contribute to the success of the LSBM process in DCPS?

    What does central administration need to do (or not do) to enable the LSBM implementation process?

11. What activities are you engaged in that are reform or improvement oriented (e.g., Comer, Family Life Center, SAGE, Schools of Distinction, etc.)